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## New Philadelphia as a Possible National Park Site

April 22, 2016 Uncategorized

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A Note from the SHA President: New Philadelphia as a Possible National Park Site

Historical archaeology has built part of its identity on the study of the disenfranchised, those who history didn't bother to record. From early work by James Deetz at Parting Ways to the archaeology of Black Lucy's Garden to Leland Ferguson's recognition of the "Afro" in Colono-Indian Ware, archaeologists have led the effort to bring Africa and Africans into the lens of American history. That emphasis has resonated in cultural resource management, where consultants have realized that African sites are places that are little known and hence deserving of study, and as a result we have seen on a long lineage of African American CRM sites and studies ranging from Yaughan and Curiboo plantations to the African Burial Ground.

While we have done a good job of recognizing African American history and sites, we have been less successful in connecting those resources to their descendant communities, in serving and promoting public outreach. As a discipline engaged in digging the earth, we realize that all of our nation's significant sites are not extant, were not built of brick and stone, and were not cherished by communities with the resources and legal position to protect and promote places of note. As a result, historic archaeological sites of the politically disconnected are too seldom celebrated and saved.

As archaeologists, we know these sites can speak since they have spoken to us. What we have forgotten is our responsibility to be storytellers and spokespersons.

Now we have a chance to have our voices heard. The National Park Service (NPS) is considering adding the New Philadelphia town as a unit and National Park.

New Philadelphia was formed by Frank McWorter, an African American who purchased his own freedom and that of at least fifteen family members, who moved to Illinois – a free state – where he was able to purchase land, and who then formed and registered the town of New Philadelphia in 1836. McWorter was the first African American to legally register a town in America; New Philadelphia was that town. It is an important place in American history, it is important to its community, and its story needs to be heard. It is a story that speaks to African America's struggle with slavery and racism, as well as African Americans' efforts to challenge social constructs by creating a racially diverse town.

New Philadelphia was discovered, uncovered, and explored by a team of historical archaeologists including Anna Agbe-Davies, Joy Beasley, Chris Fennell, Tom Gwaltney, Tommy Hailey, Bryan Haley, Michael Hargrave, Cheryl LaRoche, Terrance Martin, and Paul Shackel. It is a testament of the power of historical archaeology to connect descendant communities to a past that history forgot.

From now until June 11, the NPS is soliciting comments on the addition of New Philadelphia as a National Park unit. You can support the inclusion of New Philadelphia by commenting on the [NPS site](#).

The NPS has already signified the historical significance of New Philadelphia by adding it to the National Register of Historic Places in 2005, by designating it a National Historic Landmark in 2009, and by including it in the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program in 2013. However, only 6% of the NPS 410 units are

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## DISQUS Recent Coments



Sara Belkin

This is so awesome! Is there any published research we can get our hands on? I work in Milton, MA and I am looking for sources on Boston area transportation at the turn of the 20th century. I would...

Food, Community, and Archaeology in Roxbury, Massachusetts · 1 month ago



Larry Moniz

I'm an American of Azorean Portuguese descent. I'm a little puzzled by the emphasis on diversity within and beyond the United States. Having lived in Europe for a time many years ago, the diversity...

Diversity and Difference in SHA · 11 months ago



Sara

My first historical archaeology field school was with Alexandria Archaeology!

Alexandria Archaeology: The City of Alexandria's Archaeological Protection Code turns 25! · 1 year ago

directly associated with African American history. We have an opportunity to help right past wrongs, by including sites such as New Philadelphia among the places our nation celebrates and supports. Please join me in letting the NPS know that we believe New Philadelphia deserves to be added to the NPS as a park, which will protect its heritage and promote its legacy.

JW Joseph, PhD, RPA  
 President

## Written by Mark



Website Editor

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The government affairs update in May included a long list of issues being pursued and...

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